

## I'm constantly told to worry about my child's screen time – but I'm more concerned about my own

### Level 3: Advanced

#### 1 Warmer

a. Discuss these questions with a partner.

1. How much time do you spend looking at a screen every day? (It can be your computer, your mobile devices, TV, etc.)
2. How much time did you spend looking at screens when you were a child?
3. What factors have contributed to the increase of screen time seen in the past decades?

#### 2 Key words

a. Match the words with their definitions. All the words appear in the article.

- |                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| 1. akin _____       | a. bright, shining   |
| 2. billboard _____  | b. a range of related objects, qualities, ideas or activities  |
| 3. breathable _____ | c. suitable for humans to breathe  |
| 4. corrode _____    | d. take a brief, quick look  |
| 5. embrace _____    | e. large outdoor board used to display advertisements  |
| 6. flicking _____   | f. damage or destroy gradually   |
| 7. gist _____       | g. soft, pulpy mass  |
| 8. glance _____     | h. move text or graphics on a screen in a particular direction in order to see different parts of it |
| 9. glowing _____    | i. similar in nature; sharing the same qualities   |
| 10. luddite _____   | j. someone who is not behaving sensibly and is doing something dangerous                             |
| 11. maniac _____    | k. someone who is opposed to new technologies or methods   |
| 12. mush _____      | l. accept or support with enthusiasm   |
| 13. pare _____      | m. main point or general meaning of a piece of writing or speech                                     |
| 14. scroll _____    | n. reduce something gradually, often by a significant amount   |
| 15. spectrum _____  | o. moving from one screen to another   |

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b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences. You may need to change the form of the word.

1. She gave a quick \_\_\_\_\_ at her watch and realised she was never going to make it to the party.
2. As I drove through the city, a giant \_\_\_\_\_ promoting a new smartphone caught my attention.
3. Some chemicals \_\_\_\_\_ even the toughest materials.
4. Do you use multiple screens simultaneously – do you, for example, \_\_\_\_\_ your phone while watching TV?
5. The bond between the two main characters was \_\_\_\_\_ to that of sisters: strong and unbreakable.
6. Lisa turned out to be a bit of a \_\_\_\_\_, needing extra training to get comfortable with the new software systems.
7. I know you've always \_\_\_\_\_ challenges and new opportunities.
8. I got the \_\_\_\_\_ of the podcast but I don't remember the details, to be honest.
9. In order to save money, the company decided to \_\_\_\_\_ down its expenses by implementing remote work.
10. I saw her \_\_\_\_\_ through the pages of a magazine this morning.

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***My day consists of staring at different sized glowing rectangles – sometimes multiple at a time. This is called living life to its fullest.***

**James Colley**

**6 June, 2024**

- 1 The primary task of all parents is to worry. You are given a thousand things to worry about across the course of the day, ranging all the way from “What’s that in their mouth?” to “How am I going to get this cleaning done?” across to “How will we get through the rest of the year?” and all the way back to “OK, they’ve got something else in their mouth now. What is it?”
- 2 Once we are done with the immediate worries, we have the joy of worrying in the abstract, about things entirely out of our control. This again moves on a spectrum all the way from whether they will be a good person to whether they will have a breathable atmosphere. Of all of these, one of the most talked about, stressed about and judged by other parents about topics is screen time. It’s something that constantly plays on my mind. Every moment my child so much as glances at an electronic billboard, I can feel a countdown timer click over in my head. I try to calm myself by remembering how I was raised on television and turned out fine. Then I realise that I currently work in television, believe television to be very important, and have absolutely not “turned out fine”.
- 3 All of a sudden, I find myself having to question my own screen time. One would hope my brain is still developing – God forbid this is all I get. Or, if it is, then I would hope that it would at least corrode at a slow pace and not turn to a fine mush overnight.
- 4 I justify my time on screens believing that it is important for my work. My job is to stare at the medium-sized glowing rectangle all day. Every so often, I take a little break to scroll on the small glowing rectangle. Then, after a hard day, I like to settle in and stare at the biggest glowing rectangle I can afford. This is called living life to its fullest.
- 5 The way we measure time spent on our phone is akin to watching other cars on the motorway: anyone going slower than you is a fool; anyone going faster than you is a maniac. In the same way, anyone who watches more television than me, or scrolls for longer, has a terrible and sad addiction. Anyone who does it less than me is a simpering luddite afraid to embrace the new world.
- 6 Really, there are times when every minute of my screen time should count as two because I’m actually looking at a second screen on my phone. Then there’s the third screen, from the laptop I am absent-mindedly typing away on. Honestly, it’s four – I just checked my smartwatch to see a series of very interesting push notifications competing for my attention. Perhaps what I need is some fresh air. I would open my window but unfortunately we’ve just had flyscreens installed and it feels like that is against the spirit of this whole exercise.
- 7 Such is my commitment to second-screening, I have caught myself repeatedly checking a second screen while watching a programme made in a foreign language. I will check my phone, miss all the subtitles, and listen to characters speak a language I do not know, confident that I am still getting the gist of what is going on.
- 8 We must also wonder what is being lost with these distractions. I have heard it said before that one of the real losses from all this distracted living is the ability to sit with a difficult thought or feeling. That is an essential quality both if you wish to create art and if you wish to be a fully realised human being. So it is natural to ask, how do we pare all of this back? What damage have I already caused? How do I reclaim my lost attention span? And importantly, have we just found another thing to feel guilty about for no real reason?

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- 9 These are difficult questions and require real commitment to be able to answer. Unfortunately, I am already distracted. I've begun flicking through my phone, and when that is done, I might watch a couple of minutes of the game on the television, then it's time for another scroll to see what people are saying about the game, and of course I have so many unread tabs on this laptop to click through, and so on, and so on.

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### 3 Comprehension check

a. Complete the sentences using words and phrases from the article.

1. Parents tend to be concerned about both \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ matters.
2. Parents are often \_\_\_\_\_ by how much screen time their children get.
3. The author also started to \_\_\_\_\_ how much time he himself spent on screens.
4. He says we \_\_\_\_\_ screen time in the same way we judge motorists.
5. According to the author, \_\_\_\_\_ has resulted in our not being able to deal with complex situations.
6. He then wonders if it is possible to reset his \_\_\_\_\_.
7. The author makes it clear that we are constantly \_\_\_\_\_ by screens, which may prevent us from finding any answers.

### 4 Key language

a. Complete the sentences with the correct form of the verbs in brackets (gerund, infinitive or simple form).

1. Once we are done with the immediate worries, we have the joy of \_\_\_\_\_ in the abstract, about things entirely out of our control. (*worry*)
2. Every moment my child so much as glances at an electronic billboard, I can \_\_\_\_\_ a countdown timer click over in my head. (*feel*)
3. I try to calm myself by \_\_\_\_\_ how I was raised on television and turned out fine. (*remember*)
4. All of a sudden, I find myself \_\_\_\_\_ to question my own screen time. (*have*)
5. One would \_\_\_\_\_ my brain is still developing. (*hope*)
6. I justify my time on screens \_\_\_\_\_ that it is important for my work. (*believe*)

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7. Every so often, I take a little break \_\_\_\_\_ on the small glowing rectangle.  
(*scroll*)
8. I just checked my smartwatch to see a series of very interesting push notifications \_\_\_\_\_ for my attention. (*compete*)

### 5 Discussion

#### a. Discuss these statements.

1. 'The primary task of all parents is to worry.'
2. 'One of the most talked about, stressed about, and judged by other parents about topics is screen time.'
3. 'The way we measure time spent on our phone is akin to watching other cars on the motorway: anyone going slower than you is a fool; anyone going faster than you is a maniac.'
4. 'One of the real losses from all this distracted living is the ability to sit with a difficult thought or feeling.'

### 6 In your own words

- a. In pairs or small groups, do some online research and design a campaign to raise awareness of the potential dangers of excessive screen time and propose some strategies to manage screen time more effectively.

**Design an infographic, presentation, or social-media post to communicate your key messages. Then present your ideas to the class.**